JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ANTHONY FRANCISCO

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INTERVIEWEE: Anthony Francisco

INTERVIEWER: Frank Van Haelst

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with Anthony Francisco for the Joliet Junior College History Program by Frank Van Haelst at Mr. Francisco's home on September 21, 1976, at 6:00 p.m.

FRANCISCO: I was born in LaSalle County in Illinois, in 1899. I was the son of a coal miner. My folks never stayed there very long; they moved over here to Clark City. Then it wasn't very long till they moved to Cardiff, Illinois. The mine blowed up there at that time, and they had to move, so they moved to Fulton County at another mining area. The pay at that time at mining was about $2.50. The miners didn't work in the summer, very little. They had to live off of their garden and the regular wages was from about $1 to $3 a day. Now $3 a day, that was something extra. Grocery stores had shelves with few cans on them. Most of the stuff came in bulk and it was put into bins; and when the customer wanted say, some rice, why he scooped up in a bag how much rice he wanted. It was the same way with spaghetti and that line of food. There were very few drugs. They sold tea, too, but there was no packaged goods; everything was out in the open. They had bins for oatmeal and rice and flour and spaghetti, dry beans, dry peas; and when you wanted anything, why they weighed it out for you. If you needed kerosine or vinegar or anything, why you brought your own containers.

VAN HAELST: How did you get your deliveries?

FRANCISCO: Deliveries -- store deliveries -- there was a car or horses went out in the morning, and they delivered stuff that was ordered from

the afternoon before. They would make two deliveries, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, and the delivery boy or boys, they'd pick up the order. Very few telephones. And the biggest part of the meat markets, they had their own slaughterhouse. They rendered their own lard. They had oleo, too; but you didn't get no coloring in it. They gave you the coloring extra. And pretty near all transportation was done by horse. Either horseback or horse-and-buggy or horse-and-wagon. The railroads played an important part cause they brought the stuff closer to the retailer. But if they was called up, they knowed what time the freight train would be in, and they would be in there for their groceries or whatever pickup they had.

VAN HAELST: How were the roads then?

FRANCISCO: The roads in the summertime -- the roads was dust from five to six inches deep; in the wintertime there was mud, ruts, deep -- up to the hub of the wagon wheel. There was very few cars. There was a few cars, electric cars, in the big cities; but there was no poor man owned them, and they had to run on pavement; they could not run on dirt road. And the pavement at that time was brick. Now this here that I'm talking to you about is from about 1901 till 1918. Things got a little better in 1918, during the war; but then after the war, we come a Depression. People didn't have no work. There was no rockin' chair money. You couldn't get a job no place. They started out what they called a WPA. Well, that give them a little bread on the table; but prior to that anybody that was down-and-out, they used to go to their supervisor and he'd give them $3 a week. And that's what they had to live on, not unless they had some good relatives or friends that would help them out a little bit. In all,

In all, there was no machinery to do the work. It all had to be done by hand and crude tools. They went out to pick corn out on the farm, well, they would give you two or three cents a bushel, it depends on what time of season it was, and you couldn't pick over eighty bushels because the corn wasn't heavy. The little villages, they used to have a lamplighter; they had a post on the corner what the lantern was hooked in so the wind wouldn't blow it out, and one guy would come along at night and light them lights, and another one would come along in the morning and blow them out and clean the chimneys and refill them. Then they always used to have a lot of board sidewalks and the mayor always had one of his friends or relation to repair these sidewalks. And schoolteachers, I know a lot of them that only made $30 a month. There are a lot of schools that only operate seven months a year, especially in the country. But the country, the farmer, he needed his boy at home, or daughter.

VAN HAELST: Well, how was water brought in on farms?

FRANCISCO: Water -- all your water was brought in, he had a well dug and he pumped it and you carried it in. You hand-pumped water for the cattle. In villages and towns, the biggest part of them had rain barrels. You went out there if you wanted to wash your face. You went out to the rain barrel and got your water. And all the heating was done by coal or wood. Some of the cities, they had gas, artificial gas, made from coal; but that was mostly used for cooking stoves. And a lot of the cooking stoves had a combination coal and gas range.

VAN HAELST: Well, let's go back to the grocery stores. They didn't have any freezers, did they?

FRANCISCO: Didn't have no freezers; the only freezer that they had was in the butcher shop. The butcher shop had a freezer built. They put maybe a ton or two of ice overhead so they'd keep the meat cool. Also their sauerkraut and pickles -- when you wanted a pickle, you couldn't get no jar of pickles, you got one or two pickles, or how many you wanted. The same way with sauerkraut -- if you wanted one pound or two pounds, he went over in the barrel and dug it out. Your jellies and lard, they come in wooden pails. They also had some pickled herrings and roll. They were all made in little bitty barrels -- I would say maybe five or ten pounds. And there wasn't too much baked goods in the stores. The bakers, they had their own line.

VAN HAELST: They didn't have any electricity?

FRANCISCO: No electricity, no electricity. There was a time in the city, why they had this here gaslights, and outside the cities they had a gaslight, too; but it was made out of the gasoline that you burn in your car. But they had a generator then. It was lit by a mantle. They had carnivals and circus in them days, too. Each equipment had its own steam engine to run by. They had gasoline torches and fire torches at other concessions. For entertainment, most of the young people, they had a color talking machine. You have to crank it up after each record. Then after a while, they got the player piano that played the music rolls, you know, and we had to pump that thing to get the air to make it play.

VAN HAELST: Do you remember when they had the World's Fair, or was it later than that?

FRANCISCO: The World's Fair?

VAN HAELST: That was earlier, wasn't it?

FRANCISCO: In '33.

VAN HAELST: Do you remember that?

FRANCISCO: They had the World's Fair in '33 in Chicago. It was -- the times wasn't too good, but they had an awful crowd. I don't know how the people got there, or, but, they was a crowd there, and it was a big success. It was so big that they held it over the second year. Yes, they did. Your plumbing, you didn't have no bathrooms, or things in the house. Your toilet was outside; and when you wanted to take a bath at night, why, the mother had a wash boiler or something heating the water up there, and put it in the wash tub, and sometimes two or three had to take a bath in the same water, cause the water wasn't that plentiful.

VAN HAELST: About once a week, huh?

FRANCISCO: Yeah, on Saturday night. Saturday was a big night for baths, course, the coal miners, they had to take a bath every night, but the children and the rest of the family, Saturday night. They line up, girls first, and boys last. What else?

VAN HAELST: What about taverns? Were there a lot of taverns in Braidwood?

FRANCISCO: Taverns -- oh, taverns. There was taverns all over. The people had to have their beer or their liquor, or something. But a five-year-old boy could go to the tavern with a bucket or a jug and get his dad or -- they didn't ask him who it was for, but he could get that jugful of beer or that bucketful of beer and bring it home. Or, if he wanted, a

bottle of whiskey, he could of bought that, too, and brought it home. There was very few boys that was intoxicated during my coming up.

VAN HAELST: Not many fights?

FRANCISCO: Oh, they had fights, yes; they was always roughnecks around. If you were looking for trouble, you could find it.

VAN HAELST: Well, what was the reason for nobody really getting drunk then?

FRANCISCO: Well, I don't know there was a reason -- well, it seemed as if the boys got one drink of beer, that was all they needed. But along in 1918 they had a local option here in this country; and everybody, everybody, started to drink. And it was some bad stuff that they drank, too; but it seemed like everybody started to drink.

VAN HAELST: Did they drink moonshine?

FRANCISCO: Yes, moonshine and beer. Yes, they made beer and wine. They used to have a . . . during the prohibition they used to have a carload of grapes come in, and the dealer would sell so many boxes -- well, how many they wanted when they made their own wine. But the bootlegger, he didn't care what he made it out of, and it was rough; but they sure liked it.

VAN HAELST: Was there a lot of bootlegging in this area?

FRANCISCO: Bootlegging -- there was bootleggers all over.

VAN HAELST: Did you know any?

FRANCISCO: What?

VAN HAELST: Did you know any? Did you know any bootleggers?

FRANCISCO: Did I know them? Yes, I knowed them. And the county officials knowed them, too; but they didn't bother them too much. Then they came out with that one-arm bandit, too. That was going on, and that took a lot of nickels and quarters, but the State of Illinois, they put a cabash on it; they wouldn't allow it.

VAN HAELST: What was the one-arm bandit?

FRANCISCO: Slot machine. /Laughter/

VAN HAELST: Oh, all right.

FRANCISCO: The slot machine. They had them from a penny to a nickel, dime and a quarter. You know in these, this, small-wage place. Then they had punchboards. You got a prize, but it seems like the fellow never got the prize. The dealer would always say that there's some guy from Peoria or some place, he won it. /Laughter/ So you couldn't prove it.

VAN HAELST: Didn't they used to give whiskey and stuff to the cattle?

FRANCISCO: Whiskey?

VAN HAELST: Yes, not whiskey, but mash.

FRANCISCO: No, mash. Mash, yep, Peoria was a great distilling town and so was Pekin. And they had their own cattle in the bottoms there, and they fed them this mash. What they do with it today, I don't know; but when you go by these people that's feeding cattle, you can smell it. I don't know how they put up with it, but it's there.

VAN HAELST: Do you remember when people around here started getting their first cars?

FRANCISCO: People got cars as early as 1914. But there wasn't much; and people, the farmers, they got their cars faster than the men or these other common-working, blue-collar workers. And they used to grade the road in the spring and summer; they always had a good road. In the winter they jacked up their cars because the wagons cut the roads up so bad that the cars couldn't run.

VAN HAELST: Was there a lot of excitement when the first one came around here?

FRANCISCO: A lot of excitement?

VAN HAELST: Yes.

FRANCISCO: Well, I wouldn't say that there was too much.

VAN HAELST: No?

FRANCISCO: No. I know one time when I was a young boy, and they, some old man, he'd bought an old clunker. It was very light equipment, and you cranked it on the side, and we pushed that thing for miles and miles to get it started.

VAN HAELST: How much did a car cost then?

FRANCISCO: About $150 to $200.

VAN HAELST: Was that for a used one?

FRANCISCO: No, you could get a new car -- you could get a new Model-T

for $200. Yes, but you didn't have anything either. You had four wheels, and a seat, and a steering wheel, and a brass radiator. And they had the gas tank on for lights -- no electric lights. You cranked it up and they used to call it "Armstrong Starter." /Laughter/ We had a doctor in our town, and if he had to go east, he took the horse-and-buggy; if he went west, why he took the car, cause he had a couple of hills that the car wouldn't climb. /Chuckle/

VAN HAELST: What about trains?

FRANCISCO: Trains -- oh, the trains, they run -- the passenger trains -- you'd take a -- I'll give you a little incidence right here. Braceville, they must of stopped mining coal there in the late 1800's, but them people still clung to their homes there, and they took a train to Joliet to work. Go to work in the morning, come back at night on the train.

VAN HAELST: How long was the trip to Joliet on the train?

FRANCISCO: Oh, I wouldn't know. It cost about 3¢ a mile. That's what your ticket was, 3¢ a mile.

VAN HAELST: How fast do they go, do you know?

FRANCISCO: They didn't go too fast. And for ice, the ice companies, they had their own ponds. In the winters they made the ice and they put it up. And smaller dealers, they had their own ice house, and they had ponds and they cut this ice and put it up. They covered it up with sawdust to preserve it. And they used this here ice in iced tea or iced lemonade, and it'd come out of an old pond, and it never seemed to hurt anybody. The old ice cream man used to come by, and he had a horse and a little bell, and

you'd see kids running out with dishes for their ice cream or their mothers . They didn't have no ice cream cones. You either got a five-cent dip or a ten-cent dip, and the bananas was sold by the dozen. They wasn't weighed. Your cheese came in great big round wheels, and they had a knife in there so you could cut off how much you wanted. Oh, there was a few brick cheeses, but the biggest part of the cheese came in big round blocks.

VAN HAELST: How much was cheese a pound?

FRANCISCO: Oh, I wouldn't know.

VAN HAELST: How did they get you your meat and stuff? What about your meat?

FRANCISCO: Meat? Oh, there was a lot of butchers had their own slaughter-house. And a lot of the meat would come from either Armour's or Swift's to the depot in a refrigerator car. What I mean in a refrigerator car, they had a thing on top of the boxcar and they put so much ice in there, and that's what kept the meat cool.

VAN HAELST: What about chickens?

FRANCISCO: Chickens. Well, if a fellow went to a store for a chicken, why the grocery man went out in the coop and he got a chicken and he tied its legs together, and he'd say, "Here's your chicken, lady!"

VAN HAELST: They didn't clean them or nothing?

FRANCISCO: No! Well, maybe in the big cities they did; but the biggest part of the places, no. Well,they had men peddling chickens, too. We had peddlers, bananas, ice cream, fish, every once a week maybe a guy'd come

along selling fresh fish. Then we had the old junk man -- he'd come along and pick up rags, bones, and bottles; and we then had the man who carried a pack on his back that'd hold a whole doggone drygoods store. He'd throw his stuff out on the kitchen floor and you picked out what you wanted. Yes, that's facts. And them things was heavy! And some of them carried, you know, drygoods; and there was a few of them that carried, all they'd carry was jewelry in a case.

VAN HAELST: What about the dairy products and stuff, like milk?

FRANCISCO: Dairy products -- well, milk -- Well, you had the milk delivered to your home; and if you wanted a quart of milk, the milkman, he'd dump you out a quart of milk. We had a can there with a spout on it; and there's a lot of people that couldn't buy ice so they put their stuff, and they had an extra bucket and rope, and they put it down in the well. That was milk, and butter, and their beer, or even their wine if they had to have it cold. That's where they got it cold -- put it down in the well in that extra bucket. No, these here wells here, they didn't have a pump; you had a rope with two buckets, one on each end. When you came up, you came up with about a gallon and a half of water.

VAN HAELST: Was it cold, or . . .?

FRANCISCO: Well, the water, it couldn't have been cold. It was cold enough to keep it from, you know it only lasted a couple of days,if you wanted to keep very -- real cold water, it's going to be cold, the wells ain't that cold. I don't know what the temperature would be, but it would be a little cooler than you had it just sitting out on the table or something. They had refrigerators, ice, yes. They had 25-pound

and 50-pound iceboxes. The ice man would come in there with the ice; and you had to mop up every time he left, because the ice was dripping; and some of them, they had a pan sitting under their icebox, and if they didn't watch it, they had another mop job. Some of them was wise enough to drill a hole and leave the water run under the house. Toilet paper -- they used Sears and Roebuck catalogues or Montgomery's. /Chuckle/

VAN HAELST: Wow!

FRANCISCO: I knowed the railroad man, Navvies, what they called him, the railroad; they got a dollar and a half for ten hours' work.

VAN HAELST: What did they usually do?

FRANCISCO: They'd put in ties and changed rails and picked up low spots and whatever had to be done and whatever they do on the railroad today. But they do it with machinery today. But then you had to do it by hand, either shovel or pick or spiking.

VAN HAELST: What about -- how were the family gardens?

FRANCISCO: Gardens?

VAN HAELST: Yes. Were they big, or. . .?

FRANCISCO: Oh, they was gardens; just an ordinary lot wasn't big enough for anybody who had a family. They rented some extra ground some place and they planted stuff. They lived off the garden in the summer, cause you couldn't get, you couldn't get very far with money, all that money -- $1.50 to $2 a day, besides paying your insurance and your sick calls. But they used to raise their own potatoes and cabbage and beans and, you

know, stuff that would keep. /Chuckle/ Tobacco -- they had tobacco in the store. They used to have plug tobacco, and they had a machine there so if you wanted a nickel's worth, they would cut you off a nickel's worth. If you wanted a dime's worth, they cut you off a dime's worth, or a quarter's worth -- how much you wanted, they cut it off. Candy -- there was no bars of candy. There was all one for a penny or two for a penny or so much a pound.

VAN HAELST: A penny went a long way then, didn't it?

FRANCISCO: Oh, yes. We used to get about six jawbreakers for a penny. You probably don't know what a jawbreaker is.

VAN HAELST: Oh, yes, I know.

FRANCISCO: Do you! We used to get about six jawbreakers for a penny -- then this here Cracker Jacks that they got out, we used to buy a box for about two or three cents, but they always had a little prize in it, a little whistle or some kind of thing made out of clay. Yes. Telephones -- there was very few telephones. Maybe you had to walk a mile for a telephone -- to telephone.

VAN HAELST: Not many people to call neither.

FRANCISCO: No, you didn't have to call a doctor cause you generally had one in town. -- Now in coal camps, they had a doctor. And they paid a dollar I think, a dollar a month they paid. Then if you got a cold or a little stomach ache or anything, you went there and he didn't charge you anything. But if you were in childbirth, or had a broken leg or appendicitis, you had to pay. There was a lot of appendix operations done on the kitchen table.

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VAN HAELST: How many people had telephones, just mostly stores. . . or?

FRANCISCO: Well, stores, that's about all that had them. Well, maybe some superintendent or some miner, or you know, or superintendent of a factory or something -- he might of had a telephone. But if there was four of five working in a family, they could have a telephone. But they all had to put it (their wages) in one pile so they could have a telephone, but an ordinary man -- no telephone.

VAN HAELST: How did a grocery store keep its -- they didn't have electricity -- how'd they keep it lit?

FRANCISCO: They had either kerosine lamps for the store or they had gas lamps. They mostly used kerosine because this gas, you know, this gas like you burn in your car, that's dangerous. Well, in bigger cities, they had this here artificial gas, you know. The one they made from coal. You heard about the old gas house gang?

VAN HAELST: No.

FRANCISCO: Never did!

VAN HAELST: No.

FRANCISCO: Well, they used to have -- Joliet's, I think it ain't been over fifteen years since it went out of operation. Then it was down there on the road how you go to Stateville just over the -- where there's a railroad track or something there. They had it there; they made gas there for the village of Joliet, but everybody didn't get it, either. Oh, they had quite a few electric interurban cars. But it would take you all day if you went from Joliet To St. Louis,probably it would take you

two days to get there.

VAN HAELST: Was it faster by train?

FRANCISCO: Oh, yes. Cause these interurbans, they run all through the country; and if anybody was out there and they wanted to get on, why they'd stop and leave you on. The train, the only place it would stop would be at the station.

VAN HAELST: Where was the nearest railroad station at?

FRANCISCO: Oh, Braidwood had a station --and Wilmington, Braceville -- Coal City here had three at one time. Well they had the E.J. & E. They was down there where the high school is now. And the Santa Fe's got their's here and the C. & A., they got a depot up there; but if you wanted to get on a train, you had to be down here at Pequot Valley. They used the same track between here and Joliet. And this here Pequot Valley, they had a operator up there to throw the switches, pulling the signals for the trains to go through. Now all that's done by electricity.

VAN HAELST: Yes. Were there a lot of bums and stuff?

FRANCISCO: Bums -- Well, they call them "bums" but they was called "box-car tourists." They was people that was either looking for work, or they didn't want to work. But they'd travel from Chicago to St. Louis something terrible through here. I know a lot of them in the summer, the coal miners, they'd start out down in Arkansas and get in the harvest fields and they'd get so much a day, and then they'd work on up until they got up into the Dakotas. And then it got cold and then they'd come back to the mines. But they'd catch a boxcar and they'd go down

there. They wouldn't pay no fare.

VAN HAELST: Were the people that took boxcars, were they usually troublemakers, or did they mind their own business?

FRANCISCO: No, they didn't bother anybody. Well, if they got hungry, yes, they may come rapping at your door wanting something to eat. But for stealing and stuff like that -- no. Not too bad.

VAN HAELST: Is that about it?

FRANCISCO: Well, what else do you want?

VAN HAELST: What else have you got?

FRANCISCO: What else have I got? There's a lot of people talk about their good old days. Well, these days they've got today is better than the good old days. /Chuckle/

VAN HAELST: Well, thank you very much. This has been very interesting.

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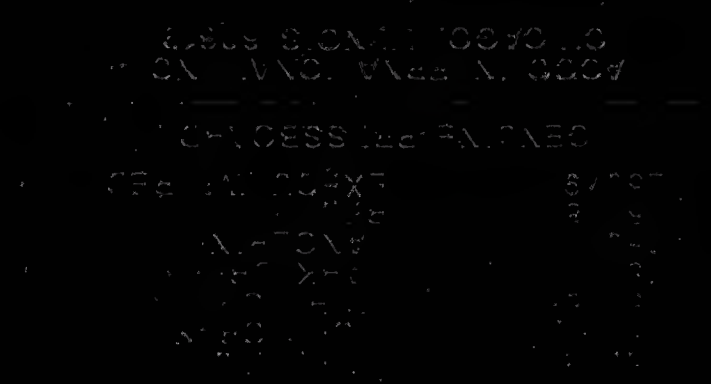
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